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ABSTRACT

Every three years, Truckee Meadows Community College (Nevada) administers a student climate survey that measures the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of its student population. The instrument used to survey the student body was designed with three basic objectives in mind: (1) validate the institutional mission; (2) obtain input regarding the relevance of programs and services; and (3) assess the on-campus climate and educational atmosphere. The topics addressed in this survey include: (1) Institutional Mission; (2) Education & Instruction; (3) Student Life; and (4) Factors Associated with Influencing a Student's Decision to Attend the college. Seventy-three percent of the 476 respondents indicated that the function of the College to "offer associate degree programs so that students can transfer to a four-year college to continue their studies toward a bachelor's degree" is "very important" and 71% indicated that the College is doing "excellent" in performing that function. Fifty-eight percent indicated that offering hands-on work experience (i.e. internships) for students is "very important" while 45% indicated that the College is doing "excellent" or "good" in this area. Students' decision to attend were frequently influenced by factors such as low to moderate cost, small class size, availability of a particular major, and the opportunity to work while attending school. (JA)

STUDENT CLIMATE SURVEY
TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPRING 1998

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1

STUDENT CLIMATE SURVEY

TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SPRING 1998

INTRODUCTION

Every three years, Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) conducts a comprehensive survey to measure the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of its student population. The instrument used to survey the student body was designed with three basic objectives in mind: (1) validate the institutional mission, (2) obtain input regarding the relevance of programs and services, and (3) assess the on-campus climate and educational atmosphere. Data derived from this research will not only lend itself to administrative decision making and the refinement of policies and procedures, but will also lead towards a heightened awareness and understanding of the TMCC student experience.

METHODOLOGY

Population: It was the intent of this research to take a stratified sampling of day and night students on the TMCC campuses. Since the number of day and night enrollments are close to equal, 500 surveys were distributed to day students, while an equal number were dispersed to night students. A total of 512 surveys were returned, 476 of them were useable, producing an effective response rate of 48 percent.

Instrumentation: Survey questions were designed by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research. Students were asked to respond to questions in three basic formats: a split 5-point Likert scale (importance vs. performance ratings), a semantic differential scale, and a traditional 5-point Likert scale. Upon completion of the survey design, input and approval was sought from the TMCC Leadership Team, Institutional Advancement, and the academic deans.

Procedure: During the month of April, surveys were distributed to individual classes by volunteering faculty members.

Data Analysis: Data produced from this study are grouped into three categories, institutional mission, education and instruction, and student life. Within these sections, each question is broken down by total response, as well as by cross tabulated independent demographic variables. Also, following the presentation of the data tables for each question is an analysis, summarizing statistically significant relationships and other important findings. Statistical relationships were uncovered by utilizing a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and/or a chi-square test of significance. A probability figure is provided when statistically significant relationships are found.

Delimitations: At the onset of the study it was recognized that a perfect random sample was not obtainable. As a result, various categories of students were not equally represented in this

research. This delimitation should be taken into consideration when one attempts to extrapolate the results of this survey to the opinions and perceptions of the entire student population.

RESULTS

Demographics:

The frequency distributions from the demographic variables collected reveal that the population surveyed closely resembles the attributes of the entire student population. In particular, the data gathered for the independent variables of age, ethnicity, and gender nearly mirror the distribution of the total student body. Table 1. demonstrates how well the surveyed population reflects that of the entire student population.

TABLE 1. Survey vs. Total Population (Age, Gender, & Ethnicity)

Demographic Variable	Survey Population % Distribution*	Total Student Population % Distribution
Age		
Less than 18 yrs. old	2%	2%
18-24 yrs. old	51%	41%
25-34 yrs. old	22%	26%
35-49 yrs. old	16%	23%
50+ yrs. old	4%	9%
Ethnicity		
Asian	6%	5%
Black	2%	2%
Hispanic	7%	7%
Native American	1%	3%
White	72%	74%
Other	5%	7%
Gender		
Male	38%	46%
Female	50%	54%

*Percents for the surveyed population do not equal 100 due to a non-response rate

In addition to the variables of age, ethnicity, and gender, the student climate survey also asked its respondents to provide information on their educational goal, enrollment status (number of credits taken), and where and when they attended class. The results of enrollment status and when students attended class were the least representative of the TMCC student population. Table 2. provides the percent distribution for the remaining demographic variables.

TABLE 2. Survey vs. Total Population (Goal, Status, & Attendance)

Demographic Variable*	Survey Population % Distribution**	Total Student Population % Distribution
Educational Goal		
AA Degree	38%	47%
Transfer	35%	11%
Occupational Degree/Cert.	6%	6%
Discover Career/Personal Enrich.	4%	14%
Update Job Skills	6%	5%
Undecided	7%	17%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time (12+ credits)	49%	17%
Part-time (0-11 credits)	47%	83%
When Do You Attend?		
Day Only	43%	38%
Night Only	16%	42%
Day & Night	37%	20%
Where Do You Attend		
Dandini Only	75%	67%
OTM Only	4%	11%
Multiple Sites	17%	22%

*Some categories of demographic variables may have been consolidated

**Percents for the surveyed population do not equal 100 due to a non-response rate

Most notably, the student climate survey under-represented part-time students, night only students, and students who attend the Old Town Mall exclusively. The survey population was over-represented by students with a goal of transferring.

Institutional Mission

In general, students responding to the survey looked favorably upon TMCC and its pursuit towards its institutional mission. Students were asked to respond to functions associated with the college's mission, whereby they were asked to state if the function was important for a college to carryout and how well they felt TMCC was performing the function. Table 3. ranks these functions by the degree of importance students placed on the indicator.

Table 3. Institutional Mission Indicators

Function	How Important?		How Well is TMCC Doing?		
	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>No Opinion</i>
Offer associate degree programs so that students can transfer to a four-year college to continue their studies toward a bachelor's degree.	73%	17%	31%	40%	21%

Function	How Important?		How Well is TMCC Doing?		
	Very Important	Important	Excellent	Good	No Opinion
Provide services such as career planning, advisement, counseling, and academic survival skills to enhance student success in college.	63%	26%	30%	40%	20%
Offer programs and services to prepare students for immediate employment upon graduation.	59%	27%	15%	40%	37%
Offer instruction in basic reading, writing, and math skills to prepare students for college level work.	55%	27%	35%	34%	24%
Offer courses and programs to meet the continuing professional educational needs of the community.	54%	31%	24%	48%	22%
Offer courses and programs for citizens to enhance or upgrade their job skills.	53%	34%	27%	42%	25%
Provide access to college for students not traditionally served by higher education.	46%	33%	30%	36%	30%
Provide a comprehensive curriculum that links general education with technical.	44%	38%	20%	40%	35%
Deliver instruction at multiple sites throughout the community.	40%	31%	40%	35%	20%
Provide programs that offer personal enrichment opportunities.	34%	42%	22%	41%	31%
Serve as a major resource in promoting economic development.	25%	38%	12%	31%	51%

Nearly 75% of the respondents cited that offering associate degree programs so students can earn credits towards transferring to a four-year institution was the most important function for a college. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the students declared that TMCC was doing an excellent or good job at performing this function. When extrapolating these responses to the entire student population, one should keep in mind that the survey was over-represented by students with a goal of transferring.

On the other end of the continuum, students stated that serving as a major resource in promoting economic development was the least important function for a college to carryout. Note, close to 30% had stated this function was neither important, nor unimportant, and 51% possessed no opinion of how well TMCC was performing this function. These numbers might indicate that a portion of the students either did not understand the question or felt it was ambiguous.

The design of these questions (a split Likert scale) lends itself to two types of data analysis. First, it is beneficial to determine what percent of those who felt it was either "Very Important" or "Important" for a college to perform a function crossed over and stated that TMCC was either "Fair" or "Poor" at performing that function. This method of analysis revealed that throughout all of the institutional mission functions, 8% or less of the students crossed over. In fact, in eight of the eleven indicators, 5% or less of the students crossed over. The percent break down for each function can be found in the data analysis of the detailed portion of the report.

The second method utilizes a technique of examining statistically significant relationships throughout demographic variables. Here, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to determine the effect independent variables had upon responses. After running tests of ANOVA, three significant relationships were revealed.

1. When students attended class effected how important they felt it was for a college to provide or enhance job skills. Day only students were less likely to state that this was a "Very Important" function. (.037)
2. Age slightly effected how important students felt it was for a college to provide or enhance job skills. Younger students, those 34 years or younger, were less likely to state that it was "Very Important" for a college to provide or enhance job skills. (.055)
3. Gender effected how important they felt it was for a college to provide access for students not traditionally served by higher education. Female students were more likely to state that this was "Very Important" or "Important." However, when asked how well TMCC was performing this function, gender had no effect on the responses. (.001)

Education & Instruction

Similar to student response in the institutional mission section, the majority of students possessed positive attitudes regarding general education and instruction at TMCC. However, the variance of response to the education and instruction functions was slightly greater than the mission indicators. Table 4, ranks these functions by degree of importance students placed on the indicator.

TABLE 4. Education & Instruction Indicators

Function	How Important?		How Well is TMCC Doing?		
	Very Important	Important	Excellent	Good	No Opinion
Faculty that make a strong effort to help students succeed academically.	71%	20%	27%	43%	13%
Provide information resources (i.e. library holdings, Internet access) to adequately meet the needs of students.	70%	21%	36%	38%	15%
Clearly stated course objectives and requirements.	64%	25%	33%	43%	12%

Function	How Important?		How Well is TMCC Doing?		
	Very Important	Important	Excellent	Good	No Opinion
Provide laboratory equipment (i.e. computers, TV monitors) to effectively support course offerings.	62%	27%	32%	43%	15%
Provide learning resources (i.e. critical skill labs, tutoring) to effectively support course offerings.	61%	26%	29%	39%	22%
User friendly course catalogs and class schedules.	60%	28%	39%	37%	12%
Offer hands-on work experience (i.e. internships) for students.	58%	29%	14%	31%	42%
Provide a curriculum that adequately responds to societal changes (i.e. technological advances, changing job markets).	57%	29%	22%	44%	27%
Provide summer session offerings that include a full schedule of courses in all degree and certificate programs.	54%	30%	20%	30%	23%
Accommodate all types of childcare needs.	43%	25%	20%	22%	47%
Provide a social climate that is sensitive to ethnic diversity, cultural differences, varying religious beliefs and sexual orientations.	39%	39%	22%	35%	36%
Establish remote access to courses (distance education, Internet courses, real-time courses provided off-campus).	36%	35%	19%	33%	42%
Offer extra-curricular activities (i.e. programs, groups, and organizations meeting outside of class) which meet students' needs.	31%	28%	14%	26%	47%

From the education and instruction indicators, students rated faculty making a strong effort to help students succeed academically at the top of the list (71% very important). Seventy percent (70%) of the students declared that TMCC was doing an "Excellent" or "Good" job at performing this function.

Conversely, only 31% of the students surveyed stated that offering extra-curricular activities was "Very Important" for a college to perform. While only 40% felt TMCC was doing an "Excellent" or "Good" job of performing this function, it should be recognized that almost half of the students had no opinion regarding this indicator. This trend might reflect that a portion of the student population was not well informed about extra-curricular offerings.

In contrast to the institutional mission functions, only six out of the thirteen education and instructional indicators recorded crossover percentages (students who felt an indicator was "Very Important" and "Excellent" or "Good").

tant" or "Important" and in turn state that TMCC was doing a "Fair" or "Poor" job at performing the function) at 8% or less. Most notably, 24% of students crossed over when responding to the indicator that addressed the importance of providing summer session offerings that include a full schedule of courses in all degree and certificate programs. In addition, 14% of the students crossed over on the indicator addressing the importance of faculty making a strong effort to help students succeed academically.

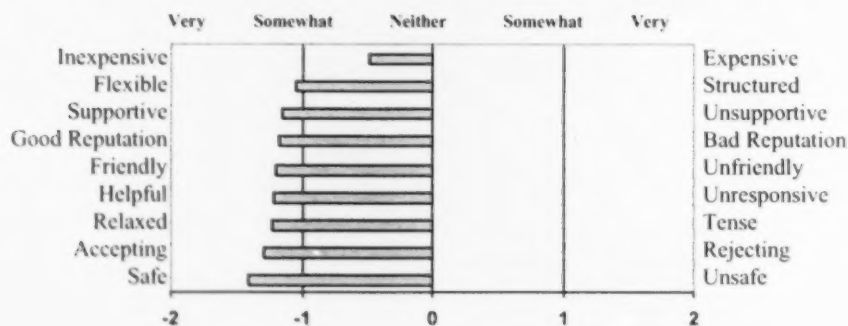
An analysis of variance (ANOVA) for education and instructional functions throughout independent variables produced the following statistically significant relationships:

1. In four different cases, gender had an influence on the responses. In each of the following indicators females were more likely to state that the function was "Very Important." It should be noted that gender had no influence on the responses associated with how well TMCC was performing a function.
 - Faculty that make a strong effort to help students succeed academically. (.001)
 - Provide information resources to adequately meet student need. (.000)
 - Provide learning resources to support course offerings. (.002)
 - Clearly stated course objectives and requirements. (.006)
2. Age and enrollment status influenced the responses on the importance of offering extracurricular activities. Students 18-24 years old were more likely to feel that this function was "Very Important." (.006) Full-time students were also more likely to view this indicator as an important function. (.015) In addition, enrollment status also influenced opinions on how well TMCC was carrying out this function. Full-time students were more likely to state that TMCC was doing a "Fair" or "Poor" job of performing this function. (.000)

Student Life

The majority of students responding to the survey held high opinions of TMCC, its educational environment, and the general social climate on campus. The first method utilized to gauge the atmosphere surrounding student life was a semantic differential. This is a technique of questioning whereby students are given two word pairs and asked to indicate which one was more likely to represent their feelings towards. Figure 1. represents the mean response of students' feelings towards TMCC.

FIGURE 1. Semantic Differential Chart (Indicate your feelings about TMCC)



The overwhelming majority of TMCC students responding to the survey indicated that they felt the college provided a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, where they felt a high level of acceptance and safety. The only variable that recorded a noticeably lower mean score was the expense indicator.

An analysis of variance revealed very few statistically significant relationships. However, when analyzing the percent distribution among categories of independent variables, some broad based conclusions and trends could be established. The following is a list of trends (not all necessarily statistically significant) that can be derived from the semantic differential questions:

- Traditional college students (18-24 years old and attending during the day) were slightly more likely to feel TMCC was inexpensive.
- Younger, White, AA degree pursuing students (.007) were less likely to feel TMCC was friendly.
- Transfer students, as opposed to AA degree seeking students, were more likely to state that TMCC provided a relaxed atmosphere, more likely to feel accepted, more likely to state that TMCC was a flexible institution, less likely to state that TMCC had a good reputation, more likely to possess a strong feeling of support from the college, and more likely to feel that TMCC was helpful.
- From ethnic categories, Asians were the least likely to state that TMCC provided a relaxed atmosphere and the least likely to state that TMCC had a good reputation.
- From ethnic categories, Hispanics were the most likely to feel accepted and least likely to state that TMCC was "Very Inexpensive."
- From ethnic categories, White students were less likely to deem TMCC a flexible institution.
- Males were less likely to state that TMCC was a flexible institution (.028) and less likely to state that TMCC had a good reputation.
- In general, older students were more likely to state that TMCC had a good reputation and more likely to cite a strong feeling of support from the college.
- Students attending night class only were noticeably less likely to state that TMCC was supportive, less likely to feel safe on TMCC campuses, less likely to express feelings of acceptance, and less likely to feel the campus was friendly.

The next method used to measure the student climate asked students to rate the importance of factors that influenced their decision to attend TMCC. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each influencing factor using a scale of 1 = Very Important to 5 = Not Very Important At All. In order to determine which factor held the most influence, each statement was rank ordered by total mean response in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Factors Associated with Influencing a Student's Decision to Attend TMCC

Ranking Indicator		Mean Response
1	Low to moderate cost (affordable for me and/or my family)	1.56
2	Small Class Size	1.81
3	Availability of a particular major	1.88
4	Opportunity to work or maintain a job while attending school	1.91
5	Large variety of programs	1.94
6	Guaranteed admission	2.00

7	I was admitted	2.25
8	Opportunity to gain a scholarship	2.30
9	General academic reputation	2.50
10	Reputation of faculty	2.56
11	Close to home	2.61
12	Availability of special academic support services (tutoring)	2.77
13	Recommendation from friends or peers	2.91
14	Recommendation from school or college counselor	2.93
15	Printed materials or video information provided by campus	3.03
16	Close to work	3.25
17	Recommendation from family	3.25
18	Convenient public transportation to school	3.65
19	Availability of on-campus childcare	3.77

Five factors recorded a total mean response of less than two: (1) low to moderate cost, (2) small class size, (3) availability of a particular major, (4) opportunity to work while attending school, and (5) large variety of programs. A mean of less than two implies that the average response to these factors was somewhere between "Very Important" and "Important."

In contrast to the most influencing factors, five statements recorded a mean greater than three: (1) printed materials or video information, (2) close to work, (3) recommendation from family, (4) convenient public transportation, and (5) availability of on-campus childcare. A mean greater than three implies that the average response to these factors was somewhere between "Somewhat Important" and "Not Very Important."

An analysis of variance and chi-square tests for significance revealed a variety statistically significant relationships. The following is a list of trends that demonstrated some correlation between demographic variables and degree of importance placed on influencing factors:

- Hispanics were most likely (47%) to state that gaining admittance to TMCC was a "Very Important" factor in influencing their decision to attend. (.045)
- Full-time students were more likely to state that attending a college close to home was an important influencing factor. (.006)
- Males were less likely to cite "opportunity to work or maintain a job while attending school" (.001) and "availability of a particular major" (.039) as a significant influencing factors.
- Full-time students were less likely to cite that recommendations by family were important influencing factors. (.039)
- Both AA degree seeking students and transfer students were less likely to cite "reputation of faculty" as a "Very Important" influencing factor.
- Older students were significantly less likely to cite "low to moderate cost" as an important influencing factor. (.002) Males were also less likely to cite cost as an influencing factor. (.016)
- Full-time students were more likely to cite "small class size" (.072) and "opportunity to obtain a scholarship" (.000) as important influencing factors.
- Traditional age college students (18-24 year olds) were more likely to cite "small class size" (.073), "opportunity to obtain a scholarship" (.000), and "guaranteed admission" as influencing factors.